

# Marginalia

The Journal of the Medieval Reading Group



**Yearbook**  
**January 2012**

<http://www.marginalia.co.uk/>

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# Marginalia

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## Yearbook January 2012

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### Acknowledgements:

The editorial team of *Marginalia* wish to thank the contributors, the advisory board, and the website experts. Special thanks are due to Kathryn McKee of St. John's College Library for her assistance with the cover image.

## Marginalia Volume 14, January 2012

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## Editor's Foreword

Megan Galbreth, *St John's College, Cambridge*

*Marginalia's* 2012 Yearbook presents the best essays written by the previous year's MPhil students. The Cambridge MPhil in Medieval and Renaissance Literature requires each student to write two essays and a more extensive dissertation, as well as participating in seminars and studying palaeography and codicology. Each year, the convenors of the course select the two essays representing the best student work of that year for publication in *Marginalia*. This year's contributors are Sophie Sawicka-Sykes and Rhian Woodend.

Sawicka-Sykes' essay, entitled 'The Anxieties of Ecclesiastes in *Piers Plowman*, with Special Reference to Passus X (B-Text),' explores the role of Ecclesiastes as a model for Langland's portrayal of epistemological difficulty in Passus X. She shows that this Biblical text, despite its attribution to Solomon, the embodiment of wisdom, portrays a mind troubled by the same doubt and despair that face Will in his quest for Dowel in Passus X. Both texts question the purpose of the created order and of human knowledge, and both pose their questions through the competing voices of multiple *personae*; the crucial difference, Sawicka-Sykes argues, is that Langland offers faith and its companion, love, as a solution to Will's intellectual deadlock. True knowledge of Dowel is revealed to consist not in the abstract comprehension of an idea, but in an ongoing process of suffering love, in which doubts play a constructive role.

In her essay on 'The Dynamics of "Schir Heorte" in the *Ancrene Wisse*,' Woodend investigates the anchoritic value of 'schir heorte,' an ideal of purity. In contrast to the Desert Fathers tradition which emphasised complete detachment from the world, Woodend finds that *Ancrene Wisse* presents purity of heart as the outcome of constant interaction with, and redirection of, worldly values. The anchoress, she argues, is meant to use her desires, not extinguish them; sexual desires, for instance, must be redirected into a desire for divine union so they can bear spiritual fruit, whereas rejecting them entirely would lead to a spiritual barrenness no more desirable than its sexual counterpart. Woodend thus demonstrates that the anchoress's 'schir heorte' is never cold or hardened, but always open and desiring in an ongoing process of purification. This concept of process is a theme shared by this issue's two essays: both shed light on the ways in which medieval culture conceptualised spiritual values such as 'wisdom' and 'purity' not as static, abstract ideals, but as processes unfolding in time, through dynamic interactions between God, the self, and the created order. This issue concludes with reviews of recent scholarship on 'Christian Materiality,' translation, and the history of Syon Abbey.

## The Anxieties of Ecclesiastes in *Piers Plowman*, with Special Reference to Passus X (B-Text)

Sophie A. Sawicka-Sykes, *University of East Anglia*

Will's quest for knowledge of Dowel, the overarching theme of passūs VIII-XIV in the B-text of *Piers Plowman*, reaches a dilemma in passus X.<sup>1</sup> While Dame Studie and Clergy criticise the hypocrisy of theologians and church ministers who do not use their knowledge as a guide for moral living, Will questions the process of learning itself: what is the point of worldly wisdom, when even the most intellectually gifted, Solomon and Aristotle among them, are condemned to hell? The works of these great masters may have provided a way of understanding the natural world and its place in the cosmos, but Will judges them to be useless, and even detrimental, when considered as part of the divine scheme of salvation: 'And if I sholde werche by hir werkes to wynne me hevene, | That for hir werkes and wit now wonyeth in pyne - | Thanne wroughte I unwisly, whatsoevere ye preche!' (X. 386-88).<sup>2</sup> The celebrated wisdom of these figures is ironically exposed as its opposite, as Will's desire to learn from them how morality is manifested in the world risks leading him into dangerous territory. This anxiety appears to conflict with the medieval Christian belief that the world is an inherently rational reflection of God's will, and coming to a greater understanding of nature entails beginning to comprehend the divine intelligence pervading it.<sup>3</sup> One of the concerns prevalent throughout the 'Dowel' section of *Piers Plowman* is the extent to which God's wisdom is revealed to humanity. If it remains hidden, then the process of arriving at conclusions based on scientific inferences about the world becomes untenable – God may assert His will as He chooses, in ways that cannot be rationally understood.

Solomon, 'the Sage that Sapience [made],' (X.378) is one of Will's primary examples of people who are damned despite their intellectual powers, and yet Will is still prepared to quote from Ecclesiastes, thought to have been written by

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<sup>1</sup> 'In the first vision of Dowel, doubts about the real value of the intellectual soul cause the major crisis in the action,' Robert Worth Frank, *'Piers Plowman' and the Scheme of Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p.48.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations of the B-text are from *The Vision of 'Piers Plowman': a critical edition of the B-text based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17* ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Everyman, 1995)

<sup>3</sup> Edward Grant, *God and Reason in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.183.

Solomon,<sup>4</sup> in support of his argument. Other characters of the third vision – Wit, Dame Studie and Scripture – also refer to Solomon as an authority, showing his importance to the scriptural tradition despite his dubious moral status. Yet while these references to the book of Ecclesiastes (known also as Qoheleth)<sup>5</sup> and its purported author have previously been considered to be a small part of Langland's overall argument, his allusions to Ecclesiastes and Solomon act as a major structuring principle behind this section of *Piers Plowman*. The questionable worth of earthly learning and the knowability of God's will are also causes of debate in Ecclesiastes, a book that was noted not only for its controversial subject matter, but also its erratic narrative voice. Ecclesiastes may be read as a correlative to passus X of *Piers Plowman*, which Langland draws upon in order to create a climate of doubt. Whilst the A-text ends before these problems can be resolved,<sup>6</sup> and much of the material relating to Ecclesiastes is either removed or displaced in the C-text,<sup>7</sup> the B-text is unique in showing how the despair of Qoheleth can be overcome through faith.

Ecclesiastes received much exegetical attention after the increased interest in the study of the Old Testament wisdom books, beginning in the thirteenth century. Langland's engagement with biblical wisdom literature has been illustrated by Mary Davlin, who lists Ecclesiastes as one of the five wisdom books referenced in *Piers Plowman*. She makes a convincing argument that, though these books do not necessarily provide source material for *Piers Plowman* beyond Langland's use of quotations, they offer intertextual links which reveal how Langland uses the forms and genre conventions of wisdom literature.<sup>9</sup> Davlin's intertextual model is particularly relevant to the present discussion, for

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<sup>4</sup>For discussion of Solomon's alleged authorship of the book, see, for example, Karlfried Froehlich, 'Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament in the High Middle Ages,' in *Hebrew Bible Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, 2 vols, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), I, p.530.

<sup>5</sup>Qoheleth is a title or epithet meaning 'gatherer.' R.N. Whybray suggests that this refers to the writer's reputation as a teacher or preacher, a gatherer of people. *Ecclesiastes* (Sheffield: *Journal for the Society of Old Testament Study*, 1989), p.17.

<sup>6</sup>Frank speculates that Langland's personal difficulties with the subject matter may have prevented him from continuing with the A-text after this point, though he cautiously adds that these difficulties may in fact be literary, pp.57-8. While he argues that Langland escapes these conundrums in the B-text by introducing the dream within a dream episode, I alternatively suggest that the poet escapes entrapment by showing how Ecclesiastes, and the parallel story of Will's quest for knowledge, can be interpreted positively through the eyes of faith.

<sup>7</sup>See E. Talbot Donaldson, '*Piers Plowman*': *The C-Text and Its Poet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p.170.

<sup>8</sup>Beryl Smalley, *Medieval Exegesis of Wisdom Literature* ed. Roland E. Murphy (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), argues that Aquinas's *De regimine principum* (1267) was a turning point, after which masters placed a greater emphasis on sapiential books, pp.6-7.

<sup>9</sup>Mary Clemente Davlin, O.P., '*Piers Plowman* and the Books of Wisdom,' *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 2 (1988), 23-33 (32).

although Ecclesiastes is directly quoted only twice in the B-text, Langland mentions Solomon multiple times, and, on a more subtle level, he integrates the constantly shifting structures of thought found throughout Ecclesiastes into his poetry. In particular, the contentious nature of the book's discourse has affinities with the debate structure of *Piers Plowman*.

Ecclesiastes is a book of theoretical wisdom, concerned with exploring the problems of life with philosophical detachment and reflecting upon their meaning.<sup>10</sup> It has the same generic colouring as Job, for its wisdom does not lie in providing proverbial instruction which may be passed down through the generations, but rather in the speaker's ability to question received wisdom and debate it, and how, it enables one to live a good life. Like the book of Job, it describes the spiritual quest of a disillusioned individual (referred to in the third-person at the beginning and end of Ecclesiastes as Qoheleth, 'the Preacher'), who despairs at earthly justice and wisdom but acknowledges that ultimate judgement lies in God's hands. Crenshaw, however, points to an important difference between the two books: Job acknowledged a presence in the universe, be it just or unjust, whereas the speaker of Ecclesiastes 'did not enter into dialogue with a living Presence.'<sup>11</sup> Although the words of the Preacher are addressed to a 'young man,' signifying a general audience who may be spiritually rather than physically immature, the book involves much debate within the self and does not include a single direct address to God.

It is a commonplace that many passages reveal tensions in the speaker's thought. There appear to be contradictions, such as, 'I have seen all the works that are done under the sun' (1:14) and, 'I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun' (8:17).<sup>12</sup> The speaker offers contending views about a variety of different subjects, including the nature of mirth, stating the aphorism, 'The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth' (7:4) shortly before saying, 'Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry' (8:15). The book also takes an ambiguous stance towards wisdom, which 'excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness' (2:13) even though the wise die under-appreciated, equal in status to fools (2:16) and in addition, being over-wise wearies the soul to the point of destruction (7:16). Medieval exegetes were keen to assign the more pious sentiments to Solomon, whilst placing any contradictions in the mouths of Qoheleth's enemies

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<sup>10</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p.5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50.

<sup>12</sup> All scriptural references are taken from the King James edition of the Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

or sceptics,<sup>13</sup> and in early twentieth-century criticism, scholars were prepared to deny certain passages authorial authenticity in an attempt to increase the coherency of the book.<sup>14</sup> It is now generally agreed that the 'prologue' (1:1-2) and the 'epilogue' (12: 9-14), in which the speaker is referred to in the third person, are editorial redactions/interpolations.<sup>15</sup> The latest criticism of Ecclesiastes acknowledges that the main speaker (the voice saying everything except for the prologue and epilogue) intentionally contradicts himself in order to demonstrate an on-going process of contemplation, weighing one thought against another 'in order to present reality in its complexity rather than to press home an unqualified conclusion.'<sup>16</sup> Critics of Ecclesiastes are perhaps still too keen to identify the different aspects of the main speaker's thoughts as contradictions or binary oppositions, when in fact the same thought is being developed. For instance, when the preacher claims to have seen all the works under the sun, but then declares that man cannot find all of them, he refers in the second case to the judgements of God – the true consequences of the works – which are concealed from humanity. The speaker therefore expresses a range of intricate and nuanced views that are affected so fundamentally by the context in which they are placed, and by the light and shade of the argument, that the voice of the main speaker seems to fracture into several dramatic *personae* representing the pious, pointless and pleasurable aspects of life.<sup>17</sup> We may draw an analogy here with *Piers Plowman*, of which Harwood says, 'Much of the power obviously lies in its being a processive and self-correcting work, not an orderly exposition of an initial vision or system.'<sup>18</sup> Harwood also draws attention to the increased autonomy of Will's interlocutors from passūs VIII-XIII, who shatter the narrative into non-linear, subjective viewpoints.<sup>19</sup> Like Qoheleth, Will debates with

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<sup>13</sup> In Jerome's exegesis of Ecclesiastes, contradictions are assigned to opponents of truth, whilst Luther interpreted the book as a dialogue between Solomon and his political associates. Katherine J. Dell, 'Ecclesiastes as Wisdom: Early Interpreters,' *Vetus Testamentum* 44:3 (1994), 301-29 (305-6).

<sup>14</sup> See George A. Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908); Hinckley J. Mitchell, "'Work" in Ecclesiastes,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 32 (1913), 123-138.

<sup>15</sup> Dell, 308; Whybray, p.23.

<sup>16</sup> Whybray, p.13.

<sup>17</sup> In 'The Voices of Ecclesiastes,' Michael Payne argues that Ecclesiastes displays the interactions between Vanity, Vitality and Piety within Qoheleth's mind, *College Literature* 13:3 (Fall, 1986), pp. 285-91 (288). The present essay is indebted to this idea.

<sup>18</sup> Britton J. Harwood, 'Piers Plowman: Fourteenth-Century Skepticism and the Theology of Suffering,' *Bucknell Review* 19 (1971), 119-36 (120).

<sup>19</sup> Britton J. Harwood, 'Dame Study and the Place of Orality in Piers Plowman,' *English Literary History* 57:1 (Spring, 1990), 1-17 (6).

aspects of his own psyche throughout the third vision,<sup>20</sup> his quest for knowledge of Dowel leading to a fragmentation of meaning.

The attribution of Ecclesiastes to Solomon, and the view that Solomon is the main speaker in the book, is at odds with the troubled nature of the content of Ecclesiastes. Solomon's reputation for possessing both practical wisdom and an extensive memory demonstrates his talent for uniting like with like<sup>21</sup>: in the judgement of Solomon (1 Kings 3: 16-28), he exposes the cohesion between the maternal role and emotional reaction, and in meeting the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10: 1-13) he is able to access his bank of knowledge and answer all of her queries in a meeting of minds. Ecclesiastes, on the contrary, shows the reasoning process of a mind at its most turbulent, placed at a sceptical distance from the actions of the world. Qoheleth speaks against conventional wisdom and authority, and yet the book is attributed to the very embodiment of earthly knowledge in all its glory.<sup>22</sup> The internal contradiction between learning, and the mind's rebellion against it, is drawn out in *Piers Plowman* B.X, wherein Will veers from paying obeisance to Dame Studie to declaring the pointlessness of scholarship. Still, Langland does not merely mirror the voices and structures of Ecclesiastes. Dame Studie's speech is a vital part of Langland's re-evaluation of the biblical text: it examines the natural processes of the world that Qoheleth declares *hebel* (vanity, uselessness, absurdity),<sup>23</sup> and offers a more positive view of life.

Dame Studie enters the third vision after Will has received definitions of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest from Thought and Wit. Following Will's request to know 'Wher Dowel and Dobet and Dobest ben in londe' (VIII.125), Wit discusses the moral philosophy of space and time, describing the location of these actions within the soul and explaining why acting at the wrong time has lamentable outcomes. It is little wonder that Dame Studie chastises him for his speech: Will is spiritually unready, and he is also too intellectually underdeveloped to understand the philosophy of space and time. In effect, Wit has brought Will

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<sup>20</sup> James Simpson argues that the poem is indebted to Aristotelian psychology, *'Piers Plowman': An Introduction to the B-Text* (London: Longman, 1990), pp.97-9. Passus X is less explicitly psychological, yet Louise Bishop asserts that Dame Studie is a faculty of mind as well as a personification of training in the liberal arts, 'Dame Study and Women's Literacy,' *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 12 (1998), 97-115 (97). A.V.C. Schmidt identifies a different type of allegory at play, which he names 'noetic' allegory, wherein the 'knowing' faculties of mind, rather than moral and spiritual qualities, are personified. 'Langland and Scholastic Philosophy,' *Medium Aevum* 38 (1969), 134-56 (134).

<sup>21</sup> James Wood, *Wisdom Literature: an introduction* (London: Duckworth, 1967), pp.49-50.

<sup>22</sup> Crenshaw, p.35; Wood, pp.68-9.

<sup>23</sup> Whybray, pp.63-4.

onto a university education before he has even mastered the basics. Before Will is qualified to grapple with questions on metaphysics, morality and scripture, he must be instructed in the arts and natural sciences. Studie enables Will to gain an understanding of the natural order through a curriculum of the trivium and quadrivium, which together form the seven liberal arts. Whilst the trivium instructed the pupil in the relationship between parts within systems of dialectic, symbol and language, the quadrivium revealed the inherent order throughout creation by exposing a numerical scheme underlying universal mechanics.<sup>24</sup> These disciplines have a family relationship to Langland's personification, Scripture, a 'sib to the sevene arts,' (X.152) since they prepare the mind for the study of theology.<sup>25</sup> The quadrivium served not only scriptural exegesis, but also scientific investigation: from new translations of Aristotle's previously unknown works (including his *libri naturales*, such as *Physics* and *De Anima*, his *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Metaphysics*), the three philosophies (natural, moral and metaphysical) were born, and became a central focus of the medieval university curriculum.<sup>26</sup> Aristotelian natural sciences, alongside the seven liberal arts, formed the Bachelor of Arts degree from the twelfth century onwards. Masters students then pursued the moral and metaphysical sciences, with theology standing as the final and most difficult stage of education for the university scholar.<sup>27</sup>

The portfolio of subjects Dame Studie professes to teach, and the fields that she fails to mention, are a telling indication of her stance toward the debate about the role of learning in the salvation of the soul. Studie tells Will that she taught Clergy, and instructed Scripture, his wife, in the following ways:

[...] I wroot hire [the Bible],  
 And sette hire to Sapience and to the Sauter glosed.  
 Logyk I lerned hire, and [al the Lawe after],  
 And alle the musons in Musik I made hire to knowe.  
 Plato the poete, I putte hym first to boke;  
 Aristotle and othere mo to argue I taughte.  
 Grammer for girles I garte first write (X.171-77).

In this section of her speech, Studie does not obviously distinguish between the trivium and the quadrivium: for instance, she mentions the preliminary study of

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<sup>24</sup> Quadrivium subjects included arithmetic (pure number), music (application of number in time), geometry (study of magnitudes) and astronomy (magnitudes in motion). Morris Kline, *Mathematical Thought from Ancient to Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.202.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Abelson, *The Seven Liberal Arts* (New York, 1906), pp.8-9; Simpson, p.105; Grant, 2001, p.32-4.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.43; p.47.

<sup>27</sup> Grant, 2001, pp.101-2.

logic alongside the more advanced area of music. She remarks on grammar, but rhetoric is subsumed into the study of Greek philosophy and poetics. There is no hint here that Aristotle produced works of natural science. Indeed, quadrivium subjects of geometry, astronomy and arithmetic are not mentioned. However, some of these subjects are noted later in the passus, set in an altogether darker context:

Ac Astronomye is hard thyng, and yvel for to knowe;  
 Geometry and Geomesie is gynful of speche;  
 Whoso thynketh werche with tho two thryveth ful late – (X.209-11).

After mentioning sorcery and alchemy, Studie concludes:

If thow thynke to dowel, deel therwith nevere!  
 Alle these sciences I myself sotiled and ordeynede,  
 And founded hem formest folk to deceyve. (X.215-17).

Although magic and the occult did not have a place on the university curriculum,<sup>28</sup> here astronomy and geology are mentioned alongside the dark arts. Her tone of disapproval concerning astronomy and geology contrasts with her endorsement of theology, a subject she does not understand and nonetheless believes to be worthy of one's highest attention. On one level, she is stressing that the sciences are difficult subjects, to which the student must dedicate a lot of time and effort in order to thrive at a later stage. Additionally, as Chaucer shows in the 'Franklin's Tale,' astronomy and geometry were thought to be used in the occult practice of magical science.<sup>29</sup> Read within the context of Dame Studie's speech between lines 182 and 215, however, Studie's suspicion of the sciences seems to rest primarily on the faithless attitude its students are free to adopt. This problem is not exclusive to the natural sciences, for she rebukes Caton's *ars deluditur arte* mentality (X.193), which advocates using rhetorical devices for persuasion, regardless of the truth. The sciences of geometry and geomancy are also 'gynful of speche' (X.210), ingenious yet slippery. These practices are contrasted with theology: whereas the student can only understand the obscure subject of theology through insights granted by faith, other sciences may be pursued for the purpose of creating deceptions and trickery, causing their practitioners to develop a false view of the world.

As well as having the potential to lead one towards untruths, knowledge without a basis in faith can result in a negative, determinist philosophy. The link between scientific and divine determinism is evidenced by medieval biblical

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<sup>28</sup> Grant, 1996, p.137.

<sup>29</sup> Schmidt, p.445.

exegesis. In particular, commentaries on Ecclesiastes, which was often read in the context of Aristotle's *libri naturales* as an exploration of physical science,<sup>30</sup> showed a tendency towards revealing a determinist mechanism at work in the natural world and in the study of the natural world. Natural philosophers interpreted Ecclesiastes 1:5 – 'The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteneth to his place where he arose' – as a basis for a deterministic philosophy that heavenly bodies control man's destiny, prompting William of Auvergne to argue against this explanation in his writings.<sup>31</sup> Even some modern criticism detects a fatalistic note in the processes of nature as described by the Preacher of Ecclesiastes. The somewhat disheartening interpretation of passage 1:5-7 offered by Robert H. Pfeiffer describes how, 'The sun, the wind, and the rivers run their appointed course monotonously on a fixed track, constantly returning in their circuits to the starting point, driven to a tedious repetition of the same process, doomed to eternal futility.'<sup>32</sup> The anxieties underlying this interpretation are either that life is pointless, or that God has hidden the meaning of life from humanity. The first chapter of Ecclesiastes reiterates that humanity cannot fully comprehend the labours of cyclical natural processes such as the passage of the sun, winds and rivers, and that 'no new thing under the sun' can ever take place (1:9). This is a world without divine revelation, a post-lapsarian state where everything is weighed down by continual effort. The world understood as such is *hebel*, emptiness: 'vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity' (1:2). Crenshaw explains, 'Since God's works cannot be altered, and none can discover what the creator is doing now or intends to do in the future, the nerve of life atrophies.'<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, there is little point in revivifying this nerve, since trying to find out more about nature and morality is also vanity.

The attitude of despair and scepticism awakened by viewing the world as under control of natural and divine determinism is one that Dame Studie is cautious to prevent. She makes allusions to chapter one of Ecclesiastes, showing how the message of Qoheleth could so easily change with the addition of one new element – faith.<sup>34</sup> In guiding Will beyond her limited knowledge to the

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<sup>30</sup> Smalley, p.17.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1968), p.17.

<sup>32</sup> Robert H. Pfeiffer, 'The Peculiar Skepticism of Ecclesiastes,' *The Journal of Biblical Literature* 53:2 (1934), 100-109 (103). Ecclesiastes 1:5-7 is as follows: 'The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth towards the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continuously, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.'

<sup>33</sup> Crenshaw, p.123.

<sup>34</sup> Greta Hort is correct in her assertion that Studie teaches Will to 'think soberly, according to faith,' though she does not recognise the allusion to Ecclesiastes. *'Piers Plowman' and Contemporary Religious Thought* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938), p.102.

character of Theology, who combines intellectual understanding with the truths of faith, Studie enacts Anselm's principle of faith seeking understanding.<sup>35</sup> Theology's higher understanding is grounded in love, which prevents one from taking a view of the world that, at best, results in scientific scepticism and, at worst, despair. Love also encourages one to invest faith in God's power to reward those who merit salvation. Indeed, Dame Studie asserts that humanity can play a part in its own salvation purely by loving God: 'For there that love is ledere, ne lakked nevere grace' (X.188). Studie's expression of the law of love is particularly powerful when she reverses the negativity of Ecclesiastes: she uses the word 'lethi' (empty, vain, a Middle English equivalent to *hebel*) as part of a conditional clause – work is 'lethi' unless accompanied by love, 'It is no science, forsothe, for to sotile inne. | A ful lethi thyng it were if that love [therinne] nere' (X.185-6). In this assertion, Studie implicitly criticises Will for pursuing Dowel for the sake of gaining knowledge, rather than for his own spiritual well-being.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Langland subverts the proverb,<sup>37</sup> 'there is no new thing under the sun' (Ecclesiastes, 1:9) to suggest that love gives meaning to the pursuit of wisdom, and indeed, is that which is most worthy of pursuit: 'Forthi loke thow lovye as longe as thow durest, | For is no science under sonne so sovereyn for the soule' (X.207-8). This formula is echoed by Trajan in passus XI, who shares Studie's urge to review the faithless, loveless world of Ecclesiastes: "'Lawe withouten love," quod Troianus, "ley ther a bene - | Or any science under sonne, the sevene arts and alle!"' (XI.170-1).<sup>38</sup> Studie therefore uses her pedagogical skills to re-assess the pessimistic voice of Qoheleth,<sup>39</sup> adopting the role of preacher and teacher to expound a New Testament ethic.

<sup>35</sup>'Fides quaerens intellectum:' faith provides the context, foundation and limits of reason. Anselm derives this principle from Augustine. Ian Logan, *Reading Anselm's 'Proslogion'* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). Though it is tempting to read Studie's argument here as Okhamist or Semi-Pelagian, the debate about Langland's alliances to the Okhamist/Nominalists or the Augustinians, and indeed this very division of fourteenth-century thought, is not as clear cut as many (for example Denise M. Baker, 'From Plowing to Penitence,' *Speculum* 55:4 (1980), 715-725) have suggested. David Aers, *Salvation and Sin* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), p.56; p.92.

<sup>36</sup>Frank writes that Studie 'warns against trying to know the ways of God instead of having faith and caring for the soul,' p.55. See also D.W. Robertson Jr and Bernard F. Huppé, *Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p.120 and Pamela Raabe, *Imitating God: The Allegory of Faith in 'Piers Plowman'* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, c.1990), p.89.

<sup>37</sup>Wolfgang Mieder, *Proverbs: A Handbook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), p.12.

<sup>38</sup>Also worth mentioning here is Clergy's comment in passus XIII: 'For oon Piers the Plowman hath impugned us alle, | And set alle sciences at a sop save love one,' (XIII.124-125). Clergy, schooled to a higher level than Studie, finds it subsequently more difficult to integrate the principles of faith and love into his personal philosophy, quoting Piers Plowman rather than as an academic source than as a role-model for life.

<sup>39</sup>Harwood, *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp.64-67, and Bishop comment on Studie's preoccupation with the voice as a pedagogic tool.

Although Studie's speech is effective in preparing Will for his encounter with Clergy and Scripture, he is soon filled with doubt about what kinds of behaviours or activities merit God's grace. Will has been told about the importance of love and faith, but at this stage of the poem he cannot put these principles into practice. Without a founding belief in salvation for the lovers of God, he is destabilised by differing interpretations of Scripture – the very presence of questions about the meaning of the Bible propels Will into doubt. Representing the desiring part of the soul,<sup>40</sup> Will seizes on any information that may be of use to him. He even describes his quest for knowledge of Dowel in terms of gain: 'For more kynde knowynge I coveite to lerne,' (VIII.110). Dame Studie recognises Will's covetous nature, grouping him with new-fangled flatterers and fools who view knowledge as part of a system of economics: 'Wisdom and wit now is noght worth a kerse | But if it be carded with coveitise as clotheres kemberen hir wolle' (X.17-18). Studie aligns Will's greed for knowledge of things beyond him with material culture. While she is able to reverse the negativity of Ecclesiastes thanks to her faith, Will is analogous to the pessimistic narrative voice in Qoheleth which pursues the unattainable, 'I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven' (1:13), and, in finding that wisdom cannot be attained through consumption of the richest and most potent resources in the land, despairs at the 'vanity' of the world. In discovering that he and Scripture have contrasting interpretations on the subject of salvation, Will declares the debate void. Time is precious, with Judgement Day drawing ever closer, and Will feels that he is not getting maximum returns from Scripture's teaching: "'This is a long lesson," quod I, "and litel am I the wiser!"' (X.371). This leads Will into his dilemma about the value of learning in general. He seizes on Solomon and Aristotle as examples of learned men who have been damned despite the quality of their wisdom, giving special attention to Solomon's reputation as a teacher and preacher:

Maistres that of Goddes mercy techen men and prechen,  
Of hir wordes thei wissen us for wisest in hir tyme –  
And al Holy Chirche holdeth hem bothe [in helle]! (X.383-5).

Within the same part of his speech, Will recognises that Solomon was condemned because of his fixation with worldly riches and knowledge:

For many men in this moolde moore sette hir herte

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<sup>40</sup>Simpson, p.95. As Ralph Hanna comments in 'Will's Work,' *Written Work* ed. Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), the narrator repeatedly falls into the danger of following his untrammelled will and jeopardising the validity of his work, p.27.

In good than in God – forthi hem grace failleth  
 At hir mooste meschief, whan [men] shal lif lete,  
 As Salamon dide and swiche othere, that shewed grete wittes,  
 Ac hir werkes, as Holy Writ seith, was evere the contrarie. (X.391-5).

Despite arriving at this conclusion, only 33 lines later Will contradicts himself. He affirms that God's scheme of salvation is an enigma, quoting Ecclesiastes 9:1 and providing a Middle English gloss on the Vulgate text:

That Salomon seith I trowe be sooth and certein of us alle:  
*Sunt iusti atque sapientes, et opera eorum in manu Dei sunt.*  
 Ther are witty and wel libbynge, ac hire werkes ben yhudde  
 In the hondes of almyghty God, and he woot the sothe – (X.428-31).

The changes made to the Vulgate text in translation are significant. Firstly, Will places the *sapientes*, the 'witty' in order of priority over the *iusti*, the 'wel libbynge,' as if to assign greater importance to the plight that he and Solomon share than to those who do good works but are not intellectually curious. Next, he suggests that the intent of God almighty is almost malicious: by changing 'et' (and) to 'ac' (but), he interrupts a continuous thought and implies that there is a moral discrepancy between humanity's view of the world and God's. Furthermore, he asserts that the works are 'yhudde,' unavailable to intuitive knowledge, 'kynde knowynge.' If good works are hidden in God's hands, how can one know how to do well? God can therefore punish us in accordance with a system that we do not understand. The *Glossa Ordinaria*, surrounding the Vulgate text with exegetical marginalia, falls silent at Ecclesiastes 9:1 – annotations disappear, leaving a blank area on which Will can inscribe his own interpretation.<sup>41</sup>

Will adapts his source text to tell a different story, biased towards his own concerns, and he also gives only one of Qoheleth's multiple opinions on the matter of divine justice; Ecclesiastes 8:12-13, for example, suggests that God's judgement works in accordance with humanity's concept of justice. Will's selective quotation of scripture is reminiscent of Lady Mede, who also quotes 'Salomon' and 'sapience' partially, so as to give a distorted view of reward value (III.332-6). It is apt that in the C-text, Langland attributes this part of Will's speech to Rechelesnesse, who is still more willing to make bold and careless statements regarding human destiny. Rechelesnesse adds an additional level of anxiety to Will's sentiment that 'wit ne wisdom wan nevere the maistrerie | When man was at meschief withoute the moore grace' (B.X.450-1) by

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<sup>41</sup> The *Glossa Ordinaria* shows that St Jerome comments on the *canis vivus, leo mortuus* passage that follows, but does not contain any annotations of the passage Will quotes. Strabus, *Glossa Ordinaria* I in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. P. Migne, 221 vols, (1844-1865), CXIII, p.1124.

highlighting prevalence of chance over merit, declaring that the gift of God is 'grace of fortune' (C.XI.283).<sup>42</sup>

In both the B- and C-texts, Rechelesnesse's appearance is closely connected to Will's reckless decision to abandon his pursuit and follow Fortune, loosing many years before eventually finding Dowel in the principle of patient poverty. Donaldson argues that it is Rechelesnesse's speech in the C-text about the virtues of poverty that places Will on the right track.<sup>43</sup> Rechelesnesse may represent two kinds of carelessness: the negligence of *wanhope* (despair), and the *carpe diem* philosophy of St Francis or the apostles, 'who, casting their burdens upon the Lord, forbore to suffer anxiety for worldly things.'<sup>44</sup> Rechelesnesse's attitude, both hedonistic and devout, is similar in tone to the voice of Ecclesiastes which promotes the pleasures of life, saying, 'There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God' (2:24). Yet his emphasis on poverty in the C-text also shows that Franciscan recklessness is not simply a selfish pursuit, but part of fourteenth-century socio-religious fabric.

It is precisely this element of wider social awareness that Ecclesiastes is missing. The Solomon of Qoheleth may believe that the righteous judgement of God addresses the imbalance and hypocrisies on earth, but he is also preoccupied with obtaining immediate pleasures and luxuriating in negativity to the point of self-indulgence. Although Wood suggests that wisdom literature is 'humanistic,' transcending the boundaries of culture and, by extension, individuality,<sup>45</sup> Crenshaw is correct in highlighting the self-centeredness of the central character in Ecclesiastes, which threatens to destroy the ameliorative didacticism that medieval exegetes were so keen to assign to the text. In *Piers Plowman*, Trajan presents Solomon as a figure who did not practice what he preached:

Although Salomon seide, as folk seeth in the Bible,  
*Divicias nec paupertates [...]*  
 Wiser than Salomon was bereth witnesse and taughte  
 That parfit poverte was no possession to have,  
 And lif moost likynge to God (XI.268-72).

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<sup>42</sup> 'Piers Plowman': the C-text ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> Donaldson, p.170.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.172.

<sup>45</sup> Wood, p.5.

<sup>46</sup> Crenshaw, p.127.

Here, it is implied that Solomon was not condemned for his idolatry,<sup>47</sup> nor was his damnation an arbitrary, inscrutable act by God. Rather, he went to hell because he could not invest in the ideal of poverty, the means by which an individual can escape the burdens inflicted by society and become a wise fool, in a state of suffering that brings one closer to God.

Trajan's speech draws attention to the notion of patient poverty which is developed throughout Passus XI. Reson plays a major part in showing Will how even God is subject to the principle of patience. Will's view of the natural world as crafted by Kynde reveals how reproductive beings in the animal kingdom follow their God-given natural instinct, their 'kynde,' bearing offspring at the appropriate times of year. Will laments that humankind appears to be an aberration in this orderly scheme: 'Ac that moost meved me and my mood chaunged - | That Reson rewarded and ruled alle beestes | Save man and his make' (XI.368-70). Here, we may be reminded of Wit's distinction between those who 'wercheth in tyme' (IX.184) by producing offspring within matrimony and those who, like Cain, 'Conceyved ben in yvel tyme' (IX.121). There is a disjunction in time between humankind and the rest of nature, and between humankind and God, which manifests itself in ignorance of human destiny. This theme is prevalent in both *Piers Plowman* and *Ecclesiastes*, as stated by Whybray: 'Qoheleth believed that man's attempts to order his life by God-given wisdom were frustrated by the limitations which God imposed upon that wisdom: in particular, that he had kept him ignorant of the *appropriate times for action*.'<sup>48</sup> However, the vital difference between *Ecclesiastes* and the ethic of *Piers* is that Qoheleth considers only the suffering of the self; *Piers*, on the other hand, suggests that suffering, or patience, is bound to the law of love, and is discoverable in both the mundane and the celestial. Humanity must labour continually to be in time, and in harmony, with the rest of creation, but this is a labour of love. While the voice of pleasure in *Ecclesiastes* urges people to enjoy the 'good' in their labour as one might enjoy food and drink (2:24), *Piers* is not concerned with personal benefits, but suggests that the hard task of living a good life is pleasing to God and to wider society.

Reson's answer to Will's query as to why he allows humankind to make misdeeds at once affirms the mysterious ways of God, and suggests that suffering is a common experience to the divine craftsman and His people:

Why I suffre or noght suffre - thiself hast noght to doone  
[...]

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<sup>47</sup>Schmidt, p.448.

<sup>48</sup>Whybray, p.67

Who suffreth moore than God?' quod he; 'no gome, as I leeve.  
 He myghte amende in a minute while al that mysstandeth,  
 Ac he suffreth for som mannes goode, and so is oure bettre. (XI.376;  
 379-81).

These lines suggest that God has the absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) to control the universe in accordance with His will, but for the sake of humanity, He compromises His power, entering into a covenant (*potentia ordinata*).<sup>49</sup> God therefore allows people free will, knowing that not everyone will do well, and sin will be the result. A human agent suffers because she or he continually fails to meet the ideal of ordered existence that is discernible in nature through reason and education. Therefore, free human beings may feel that their ignorance of the right way to act distances them from God, and makes Him unknowable, yet this very situation is born from God's love and patience, which bind together Creator and created. The shared suffering of God and humanity is most apparent in the figure of Christ in passus XVIII and his counterpart, Piers Plowman, who exchanges manual labour for the spiritual labour of perfect poverty.

Studie's lesson in love and faith and Reson's lesson in suffering enable Will to reflect on the moral dimensions of space and time many lines after Wit first introduced him to these concepts. This educational process enables him to see that the processes of the world are not mere 'vanity,' but invested with a divine presence, and to realise this is to have 'kynde knowynge.' Although the Qohelethian voice of pessimism is overwhelmed by a careful exploration of the moral laws that govern the universe, the presence of doubt and anxiety have nevertheless enriched the text by leaving room for arguments to be developed and counter-arguments to be presented. Wisdom entails allowing for multiple interpretations, and permitting seeming contraries – such as God's love for His creation and its capacity to suffer, and humankind's love for God and its capacity to sin – to co-exist. Having the freedom to choose from multiple options also increases the chances of running into error. Will may only attain the wisdom of Dowel by repeatedly stumbling in his quest and, as we have seen in the case of Rechelesnesse, the best decisions are sometimes made after the worst mistakes. Wisdom is the ability to learn from error, to endure it patiently, and thereby to grow cognitively and emotionally: 'To se muche and suffre moore [...] is Dowel' (XI.410).

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<sup>49</sup> This distinction is famously used by William of Ockham. Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, 3 vols, London: T&T Clark, 2006), I, p.229-30.

## The Dynamics of 'Schir Heorte' in the *Ancrene Wisse*

Rhian Sara Woodend

In the *Ancrene Wisse*, 'purte of heorte'<sup>1</sup> ('cleanness of heart'<sup>2</sup>) is envisaged as a universal principle that all anchoresses should follow. It is held as a basic concern of religion: '*quantum ad puritatem cordis, circa quam uersatur tota religio*' (Preface, 38-39). As a command from God, the keeping of a pure heart, a 'schir heorte' (VII.24), is an unchanging principle that demands the same fixity of its followers, 'for-þi ha is eauer an wiðute changunge, | ant alle ahen hire in an eauer to halden' (Preface, 46-47). The *puritas cordis* envisaged by the author is, in many ways, a feature of traditional monastic asceticism, the pure heart being distilled away from the world in solitude. Yet the pure heart in *Ancrene* is hardly as static as the author's introduction and the Cassian tradition might suggest. The heart of the anchoress is not like the purity of water, necessarily untouched by affliction and contact. Its purity is established amidst a series of ingressions and egressions that bring it into contact with the world around it. It is a volatile space of memory and desire, a natural bridge between the anchoress and the world she supposedly leaves behind. In a text where affliction and salvation are indelibly linked, the heart's purity develops within a process that necessarily evades boundary. The heart must recognise affliction from both within and without to understand salvation. It must break itself in compunction to atone for sins and realise love in its most outward expression. The heart of the anchoress does not stand still. Rather, 'attraction' and 'expulsion',<sup>3</sup> as Albertus Magnus would later write, become its necessary anatomical and devotional motions.

It is worth noting the primary derivations of *puritas cordis* as an ideal found in solitude, before reviewing the ways *Ancrene* reinvigorates this notion. Cassian, writing in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, perceived the term as a monastic condition, the pure of heart being those limiting their contact with the world and observing strict rules of conduct. In *Institutes* he praises the anchorites of the Diolces desert for their commitment to renunciation. Leaving the world behind them, they 'penetrate the deep recesses of the desert', barely surviving from land unfit

<sup>1</sup> *Ancrene Wisse Vol.1* ed. Bella Millet (Oxford, 2005) Preface, 40. All further references made to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> *The Ancrene Riwele* trans. M.B. Salu (London, 1955) p.2.

<sup>3</sup> *On Animals* trans. Kenneth F. Kitchell Jr. (London, 1999) l.iv.574.

'for any cultivation'.<sup>4</sup> In this state of physical scarcity and the absence of worldly distraction, the pure heart can be located. St Benedict, a later follower of Cassian, would combine this desire for isolation with a fear of circulation both within and outside of monastic confines. A Brother or Sister returning from a journey should be purged of their encounters and the inclination to share them with the rest of the enclosure:

Pat day þat sho cumis hame, sal sho recaie þe benicun at ilke ure  
Of þat þai haue misdou with siht, ouþir with iois, ouþir with speche,  
ouþir ani iuil dedis. Þai shal noht telle til þe toþir alle þat þai haue  
sene vte & herd [...].<sup>5</sup>

Purity of heart is not only configured as distance between inner and outer worlds, but a distance created between sensuous and higher intellection. Both *Ancrene* and *The Rule of St Benet* follow Cassian by envisaging the heart with metaphorical senses.<sup>6</sup> In *The Rule*, the novice is required to listen intently to the commandments of the 'mastir', laying them near to 'þe eere of the herte'<sup>7</sup>, whilst the anchoress's heart is perceived with 'ehnen' (IV.1369) and 'nease' (IV.561). In states of silence and solitude, the heart can hear God's words:

'Ich chulle leade þe', he seið to his leofmon, 'into anli stude, ant ter  
Ich chulle luueliche speoke to þin heorte, for me is lað pre-  
asse.' (III.685-7).

Just as Cassian claimed that the heart would see clearly the mysteries of scriptures in the absence of carnal vices, the heart's senses are opposed to the fallibility of their corporeal counterparts. To allow clear contemplation, the pure heart had to be sealed from the world thereby avoiding, according to Cassian, the 'dullness' and 'impurity' that plagued the hearts of those 'unable to take in the light of truth'.<sup>8</sup>

At first sight, *Ancrene* seems to accord to the teachings of Cassian. Distanced from the world around her, and bound in timeless repetitions of devotional stances, the anchoress's heart is deemed pure by containment and isolation. It is tempting to view the pure heart as a static entity, defined by its extraction from the world and its associated desires. Jager points to a tradition of saints' writing which depicted the pure heart as an exemplary object, often inscribed and extractable from the body after death, 'a physical organ [...] some-

<sup>4</sup> *Institutes* trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York, 2000) V.xxxvi.1.

<sup>5</sup> 'Northern Prose Version' in *Three Middle English Versions of the Rule of St Benet*, ed. Ernst A.Kock (first publ. London 1902, repr. New York 1972), ch.LXVII, p.45.

<sup>6</sup> See also Albertus Magnus *On Animals*: 'two appendages visible on the heart [...] somewhat like ears' (I.iv.580-1).

<sup>7</sup> 'Northern Prose Version' p.1.

<sup>8</sup> *Institutes* V.xxxiv.

times opened, read and interpreted like a book'.<sup>9</sup> Yet the heart of the anchoress deviates in interesting ways from the model fetishised in a legend like Clare of Montefalco 'whose spiritual sisters [...] threw themselves upon her body, tore out her heart, and found incised upon it the insignia of the Passion'.<sup>10</sup> Despite her author's penchant for *sententiae* and exempla, his narrative desire to reveal the 'heart' of his matter, the anchoress's heart retains an obscurity and volatility at odds with such extractions.

There are too many fissures in the fabric of *Ancrene* that prevent 'schir heorte' (VII.23) from being perceived as an entity isolated from society and untouched by sensual affliction. Despite creating a distance between the exterior world and the inner purity of the anchoress, we are constantly made aware of the magnetism that draws the heart outwards and the world inwards. A recurring image of part II is the leaping heart that slips away so easily from the body-cell structure. The author's use of David exemplifies this complexity:

Me, surquide sire, ne herest tu þet Davið, Godes ahne deorling, bi hwam he seolf seide, *Inveni uirum secundum cor meum* ('Ich habbe ifunden', quoð he, 'mon efter min heorte') – þes, þe Godd seolf seide bi þis deorewurðe sahe king ant prophete icuret of alle, þes, þurh an ehe wurp to a wummon as ha wesch hire- lette ut his heorte ant for3et him seoluen, swa þet he dude þreo utnume heued ant deadliche sunnen [...] (II.107-113).

David's heart is pulled outwards, 'þurh an ehe wurp' and into the 'put' (II.125) of the female form that attracted his looks. His sight is envisaged as 'extramissive'.<sup>11</sup> It takes the heart with it so the lightest look becomes assimilated to the 'liht lupe' (II.9) of both the heart and the individual into the world of sin. Looking outwards, even momentarily, dislocates reason and memory as David 'for3et him seoluen' (II.112). Despite his status as a watchful and holy man, he attests St Gregory's maxim that 'na þing ne etflið mon sonre þen his ahne heorte' (II.10-11). The heart is here 'a ful wilde beast' (II.9) akin to the animal among body parts that Aristotle had once envisaged: 'The heart is straight away manifestly in motion, as if it were an animal'.<sup>12</sup> There is, however, another dynamic to the author's example. If David loses his heart by looking, we are made aware of the open point that drew the heart from his body: Bathsheba uncovers herself before David's eyes. There is no mention of any lustful looks that

<sup>9</sup> Eric Jager, 'The Book of the Heart', *Speculum*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Jan 1996) p.15.

<sup>10</sup> C. Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley, 1997) p.211 quoted in Jager p.15.

<sup>11</sup> Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2002) p.71. The female affected by receiving the gaze also indicates the 'intromissive' qualities of sight.

<sup>12</sup> *On the Parts of Animals* trans. J. Lennox, ed. J.L. Ackrill (Oxford, 2001) III.iv.666<sup>a</sup>.20.

she may have given him, but this simple act of uncovering draws his eyes and heart toward her like 'þe beastlich mon' who falls into the 'put' (II.125) of the woman's face and body. It is worth noting the way desire is engendered in this example. The female body and its mannerisms are presented as a series of concave spaces that draw the world inwards (II.128-132). This evocation of human desire as endemic magnetism, finds its correlative in anatomical thought. Since Aristotle it had been believed that the female, by virtue of being cold and moist, inevitably attracted the heat of the male. As 'mobility was associated with heat and the ability to externalise', the heated heart of the male was engendered with certain projective qualities which were drawn into attraction with the receptivity of the female providing the 'passive material for generation'.<sup>13</sup> Relations echoed intercourse as a woman was defined by 'Aristotelian ideas of her need for completion.'<sup>14</sup>

The author of *Ancrene* can hardly deny the power of such attraction and neither does he attempt to. His advice that women cover themselves and the 'ehþurl' (II.18) of their enclosures seem rather limited defences in a world where, as the contemporary Bishop of Paris, Guillaume d'Auvergne would claim, 'ingressions and egressions'<sup>15</sup> of the body-cell boundary are natural inevitabilities. The author recognises that the heart's enclosure does not abate the desires at work within the anchoress and the world beyond her. He portrays his novice as naturally inquisitive, "'Me, leoue sire," seið sum, "ant is hit nu se ouer -uuel forte totin utwart?"' (II.45-46). Despite being contained from the world, the anchoress continues to experience desires which find a natural release beyond the enclosure, constantly threatening to break through the 'flod-3eten' (II.396) of the senses. This is seen in the author's denigration of excessive speech. The ideal solitary should be silent, damming her speech so her thoughts may rise to heaven (II.389). Yet there will be moments when the anchoress must find release: 'Hwen 3e nede moten, a lute wiht lowsidi up ower muðes flod-3eten, as me deð ed mulne, ant leoted adun sone' (II.395-396). As 'flood gates', the senses are evoked as constant intermediaries of excess. When the anchoress opens her mouth, speech flows and builds, 'from meosure into unimete, ant of a drope waxeð into a muche flod [...] for wið þe fleotinde word tofleoted þe heorte' (II.424-426). Desire, contained in such density, is envisaged as breaking the heart upon release. The anchoress's heart constantly abrades with the world,

<sup>13</sup> Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (Yale, 2010) p.108.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Robertson, 'Medieval Medical Views on Women' in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* ed. Linda Lomperis et al (Pennsylvania, 1993) p.149.

<sup>15</sup> *De Universo* I.1042 trans Webb p.60.

her desires only a slip away from internal containment to external capaciousness.

Whilst Cassian claimed that the heart should be mortified of its desires with a 'frost of abstinence', freezing 'the movements [...] and the impulses of nature,'<sup>16</sup> the heart of the anchoress is not evoked as a similarly deadened vessel, but a space dense with experience. Aristotle argued for the heart's sentient importance: 'Again, the movements of pleasures, pains, and all perception [...] originate there or proceed to it'.<sup>17</sup> The author of *Ancrene* registers this sensual nature in his depiction of the anchoress's union with Christ. Whilst we might expect a more mystical encounter, the heart's 'carnal' contemplation is here a reflection of the author's Bernadine sources:

Notice that the love of the heart is, in a certain sense carnal, because our hearts are attracted most toward the humanity of Christ and the things he did or commanded while in the flesh.<sup>18</sup>

The heart is associated with forces of attraction, here drawing the anchoress into a communion founded on shared physicality and 'humanity'. The anchoress's heart is elsewhere imagined as a 'bur' (I.243) where she embraces Christ 'ant haleð him heteueste' (I.244). This emphasis upon embrace is later sexualised as she is asked to draw upon experience from the outside world:

Rin him [Christ] wið ase muche luue as þu hauest sum mon sum-  
chearre, he is þin to don wið al þet tu wilnest. (VII.334-335).

In the 'bower' of the heart, the anchoress learns to redirect experience and desire into union with the divine. It is worth noting that the language of desire that we perceived in David, of eyes, hearts and reflexive attraction, is also re-envisioned in this part of the text. Christ is evoked as the wooer knight in pursuit of the lady of the castle. We are told his heart has been 'ouercumen' (VII.82) just as David's escaped with desire. The precarious act of looking is here reinterpreted as a necessary show of affection:

He com him seolf on ende; schawde hire his feire neb, as þe þe wes  
of alle men feherest to bihalden; spec se swiðe swoteliche, ant  
wordes se murie | þet ha mahten deade arearen to lieu; wrahte feole  
wundres ant dude muchele meistries biuoren hire ehsihðe [...] (VII.75-79).

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<sup>16</sup> *Institutes* I.xi.

<sup>17</sup> *On the Parts of Animals* III.iv.666<sup>a</sup>.11.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super Cantica Caniticorum* ed. J.Leclercq et al (Rome, 1957) I.20.118, trans. Linda Georgianna, *The Solitary Self* (Harvard, 1981) p.74.

The above develops the tale of David by legitimising the workings of sight and exposure. The knight makes a spectacle of his face and deeds, entertaining the female's eyes with 'wonders'. The pull of desire that drew David's eyes and heart into the 'pit' of the female form is redirected here as a necessary act of enlivening and animating the 'deade'. It builds upon evocations of Christ's love as a lending of heat to the female. His love is imagined as 'grickisch fur' (VII.257) kindled in the heart of the anchoress. Her love cannot be lukewarm but 'schulde leit in al o lei i luue of ure Lauerd' (IV.351). Such incendiary advances humanise divine encounter, linking it suggestively to the male projection and the female acceptance of heat that was a part of intercourse. As Robertson notes, the centrality of sexual union with Christ indicates 'the male author's concern to address the perceived needs of his female readers'.<sup>19</sup> The heat of sexual union could purge the female body of its excess moisture and diminish the coldness of her being. I would however add to Robertson by saying that such inherent desires, previously cast as the fall of man and woman, David and Bathsheba, are here reoriented to envisage union with Christ as a partly anatomical and devotional necessity. The 'schir heorte' learns not to extinguish these natural desires but rather to refocus them.

The coming of the Knight adds another dynamic to our perception of the pure heart. By juxtaposing the hard and the pure hearted, the author demonstrates the detriment that can arise from the solitary condition. The lady of the castle is impervious to the knight's advances being so 'heard iheortet þet hire luue ne mahte he neauer beo þe neorre' (VII.74). Her landscape is markedly barren, 'hire lond al destruet, ant heo al poure inwið an eorðene castel' (VII.68-69). Unlike the other women of the author's examples, she is not praised for her containment but denigrated for her lack of openness. In this sense, the metaphor builds upon the secular differentiation of *cor gentil* and *cor villan* in which the heart's nobility resided in its susceptibility to love.<sup>20</sup> In her separation from the world, the hard-hearted lady, and arguably the anchoress, becomes susceptible to a new danger. The anchoress, who thinks herself pure by being free of affliction and desire, unwittingly plays into the devil's hands: 'For-þi, leoue sustren, hwa-se nis nawt asilent, ha mei sare beon ofdred leste ha beo biwunnen' (IV.708-710). Here 'schir heorte' does not describe the hearts that are impervious to the world, but those that are receptive to experience. Isolation and lack of receptivity are bound to sloth, the sin representing inactivity, heaviness of heart and idleness. The lady of the castle, barricaded from the world around

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<sup>19</sup> Robertson p.151.

<sup>20</sup> See Guinizelli in Webb p.64.

her, becomes associated with the barren and melancholic. She is described as 'poor' like the 'poure heorte' symbolised in the cub of *pusillanimity*, too cowardly to advance into the world and to act 'in hope of Godes help' (IV.352). Estrangement from the world is not only cowardly, it is here profoundly anti-generative. Her barren habitation is evocative of flawed conception. This was, after all, a process that relied upon the receptivity of both the heart and the womb, Mary being evoked as a prime example of the 'softe' heart amenable to conception and the nesting of good deeds (III.221-233). By denying this contact, the hard-hearted are linked to a perverse form of the same process, nursing the cubs or 'hwelpes' of sins in 'hire breoste' (IV.307).

The openness expected of the pure heart can seem problematic in so far as it renders the heart vulnerable to all around it. The text attempts to overcome the lacunae indicated in the heart's receptivity by reconciling notions of love and affliction. The primary evocation of the battleground as a site that only the most foolhardy of anchoresses would enter is later re-envisaged as a spiritual and bodily necessity. In medieval culture, love and affliction were close companions. Webb notes a similarity between the remedies for plague prescribed by Tommaso del Garbo and Giovanni Dondoli and those advised by Avicenna and Constantinus Africanus to remedy lovesickness.<sup>21</sup> In *Ancrene*, affliction and love hold the same purgative qualities. The incendiary nature of Christ's love is linked to the 'fire' of illness sent as temptation: 'Secnesse is a brune hat forte þolien, ah na þing ne cleneseð gold as hit deð þe sawle' (IV.63-64). By opening her heart to Christ, the anchoress must make herself vulnerable to ailment as a test of her capacity to love. Love, in the *Ancrene*, is achieved in congress with the world and in this congress the 'schir heorte' must partake: 'þet tu al þet tu dest, do hit oðer for luue ane of Godd, oðer for oþres god ant for his biheue' (VII.23-25). The 'schir heorte' commits itself to a path of loving others in order to love God, redirecting experience of the world towards an alternative end. The ascetic practice of distancing the world is here replaced by salvation that necessitates communion, a communion not devoid of difficulty. When the anchoress acts for others, there is always a risk that earthly needs may overtake the spiritual. So subtle are the devil's assaults that even compassion can become a vice:

Bringeð hire on to gederin ant 3eouen al earst to poure, forðre to oðer freond, aleast makien feaste ant wurðen al worldlich [...] Godd wat swuch feaste madeð sum hore. (IV.648-651).

The author recognises the risk inherent to human relations, advising the anchoress that her women be well taught 'for 3e mahen muchel beon þurh ham

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<sup>21</sup> Webb p.87.

igodet – ant iwurset’ (VIII.299-300). Whilst the fear of circulation that riddled *The Rule* is still present, it is here tempered by a hope of ‘reconciliation’ and ‘concord’ (VIII.264). The anchoress must be aware of the problematic circulations that link her to the world beyond the cell. Her handmaidens cannot bring idle tales to and from the enclosure and they should not behave in ways that might incriminate both themselves and the anchoress they serve. Yet where as *The Rule* interprets such outward ventures as inevitably incriminatory, the handmaidens of the anchoress are simply advised to be guarded: ‘Hare lates lokin warliche, þet nan ne mahe edwiten ham in hus ne ut of hus’ (VIII.253-254). The circulations that take place between the anchoress and those around her are invariably fraught with risk, and yet the ‘schir heorte’ must occupy this uncertain territory, negotiating the concurrent demands of love and affliction, hope and fear.

Purity is not indigenous to the heart but achieved through processes of ongoing ‘cultivation’ as the author demonstrates by Moses:

[...] al þet wa ant al þet heard þet we þolieð o flesch, ant al þet god þet we eauer doð, alle swucche þinges ne beoð nawt bute as lomen to tilie wið þe heorte. (VII.13-15).

Envisaging purification as ‘cultivation’ or ‘tilunge’ departs from the notions of erasure so often assumed by purification. Erasure is in fact a troubled process in *Ancrene*, as some final observations upon the place of *memoria* will show. The heart had long been associated with memory, their relation bound in the Latin ‘recordari’ and its cognate noun ‘recordatio.’<sup>22</sup> *Ancrene* endows the heart with the same recording capacities, the author constantly urging his novices to commit his *exempla* to heart. The anchoress’s memories, like her desires, must be re-directed as didactic tools so that worldly experiences, from child’s play to marriage politics, provide ‘an objective correlative of God’s ways.’<sup>23</sup> What Georgianna fails to comment upon here, however, are the difficulties of ‘forgetting’ that such examples expound. As Carruthers observes, memory held an important place in meditation, to the extent that ‘a monk who had completely forgotten himself by obliterating his own past would not be able to pray.’<sup>24</sup> Erasing the memory was not simply ill advised, it was conceived to be almost impossible. This was an idea contested almost a century before *Ancrene* in the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux, who attempted to divorce forgetting from the obliteration often presumed by the term. He illustrated the impracticability of such

<sup>22</sup> Mary Carruthers, *Book of Memory* (Cambridge, 1990) pp.48-49.

<sup>23</sup> Georgianna p.66.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought* (Cambridge, 1998) p.96.

obliteration through the metaphor of dyed parchment. As a tool of erasure passes over the material, it creates lacunae and tears before it does a clear surface: 'In vain should I try to scrape it away; the parchment rips before the messy letters are erased.'<sup>25</sup> Forgetting is a problem shared by both Bernard and the author of *Ancrene*. Like parchment, the surface of the anchoress's heart is never wholly amenable to erasure. The memories of past sins are ingrained as scars upon it, their outline providing the devil with an alternative to new temptations:

Ant spekeð þus þe alde sweoke toward hire heorte wordes þet ha  
 3are herde fulliche iseide, oðer sihðe þet ha seh, oðer hire ahne  
 fulðen þet ha sumhwile wrahte. (IV.1366-1368).

The devil opens the wounds of the *memoria* so as to 'bifulen' (IV.1369) the anchoress with thoughts of past sins. The pure-hearted cannot obliterate such experiences as 'forgetting' becomes little more than refocused memory. The key movement involved in finally cleansing the heart is, importantly, not one of extraction, distillation, erasure or obliteration, but a 'prichunge' (IV.1494) of the heart called compunction. This contained act of breaking ruptures the pride that occurs with insularity whilst redirecting the dissipation associated with the heart's exposure to the wider world. Within this process we are made to realise that the anchoress's purity resides in her understanding of her 'wacnesse' (IV.757). She must recognise the imperfections of her heart, the fragility of its surface and the inevitable pervasion of her desires and memories so as to arrive at a notion of purity formed from process and negotiation, as opposed to abstract separation.

The 'schir heorte' of *Ancrene* is woven from dense fabric. Its surface is a haven for desires, memories and experiences. Its weave is compiled as boundaries merge: affliction becomes an accessory of love whilst understanding is evoked as another symbolic breaking of boundary, a 'pricking' of the heart and its contents. The purity of the heart rests upon its cultivation, its ability to mediate the inner and outer life into an attractive and expulsive movement, refusing to leave one world behind for the sake of the other. The *Ancrene* creates a dynamic entity that laicises devotion by recognising the 'schir heorte' as a complex intermediary for the material and the spiritual.<sup>26</sup> For the anchoress is, if anything, human. Despite burial rites and inauguration into containment, her heart would continue beating within her, a lasting evocation of her humanity.

<sup>25</sup> *Ad Clericos* XV.28 pp.102.17-104.5 trans. Carruthers 1998 p.96.

<sup>26</sup> On 'laicisation' see Nicholas Watson, 'Ancrene Wisse, Religious Reform and the Late Middle Ages' *Companion to Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Yoko Wada (Woodbridge, 2003) pp.197-226.

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# Marginalia Reviews

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*Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*

Caroline Walker Bynum

(New York: Zone Books, 2011)

ISBN 978-1-93-540810-9 (Hardcover) 408 pages.

£22.95 (\$32.95)

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Should we venerate worms that have fed on the bodies of saints? Can Christ's foreskin bi-locate? And what is happening, exactly, when miraculous bleeding hosts start to look a bit mouldy round the edges? These are some of the questions that exercised medieval minds when they thought about "holy matter", the subject of Caroline Walker Bynum's latest book.

*Christian Materiality* develops, and is very much in conversation with, Bynum's previous work: on bodily disintegration and reintegration (*The Resurrection of the Body*, 1994); on conceptions of physical change (*Metamorphosis and Identity*, 2001); and on transformation miracles and the nature of holy matter (*Wonderful Blood*, 2007). As ever, her approach is consummately interdisciplinary, and she moves easily – and often – between iconographic, theological, literary, and historical registers. The period covered is 1100–1500 and examples are adduced from all over northern Europe. It has been a good year for old body parts, and Bynum's book provides a useful theoretical gloss not only on Charles Freeman's popular history of relics – *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (Yale, 2011) – but also on the British Museum's spectacular exhibition of reliquaries, *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (British Museum Press, 2011).

Bynum's focus here is on 'paradox' (a word she sometimes overuses): principally the paradox implicit in any Christian conceptualization of the physical stuff that is created 'matter' (*materia*), particularly when it is subject to miraculous change. As she repeatedly asserts, contingent, physical matter is 'both the opposite to and the disclosure of God'; it is both 'the changeable stuff of not-God and the locus of God revealed.' Bynum recognizes, of course, that it is the incarnational aspects of the Christian faith that give a particular edge to its ideas about matter. However, she seeks to go 'beyond the body' that has been the focus of so much recent interdisciplinary work in the period (observing that such work 'has tended to substitute the term "body" for "human individual" or "person"'). She therefore stresses the theological importance of God's creation as well as His incarnation, and the book's strikingly beautiful cover appropriately comprises a detail from a fourteenth-century depiction of God creating the world. Her focus is on *corpora* understood not as human 'bodies' but 'in the larger sense of *objects* – the stuff of the universe,' both animate and inanimate. And above all, the book seeks to investigate why 'it was so extraordinarily difficult for people in the later Middle Ages to see matter as truly dead, in the sense of inert, rather than rotten or fertile – that is, percolating with threatening, yet glorious physicality.'

The first chapter ('Visual Matter') discusses a variety of devotional objects including statues, paintings, reliquaries, monstrances, and folding altarpieces. Here Bynum engages fruitfully with art historians including Herbert Kessler and Hans Belting, and broaches a number of potent if familiar issues: the 'three-dimensional,' 'tactile' and 'handleable' nature of much medieval art; its self-conscious materiality ('medieval artists expected viewers to notice and admire the stuff they employed *as stuff*'); and the ambivalent nature of the iconoclastic impulse (with 'its paradoxical sense that images are threatening both because they are dead and because they are not').

The focus of the following chapter ('The Power of Objects') is theological and devotional engagement with the miraculous matter of 'incorruptible' relics and bleeding Eucharistic hosts. Inconveniently, this was matter that tended to go mouldy, a fact requiring elaborate explanation as well as miracles of renewal. Here, citing recent arguments from Steven Justice, Bynum emphasises that such holy objects elicited from clergy and laity alike 'a complex stance in which belief jostled constantly with interrogation' so that the doubt provoked by miraculous matter was almost as important a part of its power as the belief it also inspired. In this section, Bynum returns to the celebrated case of the blood-spotted hosts of Wilsnack in northern Germany (once visited by Margery Kempe), a case she has treated more fully in *Wonderful Blood*.

In the third chapter ('Holy Pieces') Bynum examines aspects of medieval thinking about the relationship between part and whole, particularly as this relates to body-part relics and Eucharistic 'concomitance.' 'Fragmentation,' she observes, 'was central to the Christian cult of Holy Matter' since Christians were always busy dividing bodies for religious purposes – either the bodies of saints divided into relics or that of Christ divided in the Eucharist. Bynum argues that it was decay rather than disintegration that was feared the most. 'Reliquaries glorify and sublimate partition. What they deny is putrefaction.' With Christ, on the other hand, 'part is whole.' Concomitance – the theory that Christ is wholly present in every particle and fragment of consecrated host – had been developed in the eleventh century to explain why he was not damaged or destroyed when the host was broken and chewed. This 'theological use of synecdoche,' which became a late medieval 'habit of mind,' also allowed Christ to be present at the right hand of the Father in resurrected glory and on the altar at every celebration of the Eucharist. The 'bi-location' of his foreskin (both in his glorified body and in discrete earthly relics) was similarly accounted for.

Further theological and philosophical attempts to *explain* the miraculous behaviour of holy matter are discussed in Bynum's final chapter ('Matter and Miracles'), which charts an increased use of natural philosophy to explore theological issues in the later medieval period. The chapter also includes a particularly interesting discussion of the important influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (a poem whose first and last books emphasise 'the fecundity of things forever breaking into new forms') as well as that of Aristotle's *De Generatione et Corruptione*. Medieval people, Bynum emphasises, saw matter 'not only as stuff [...] but also as *dynamic* stuff'; for them there was 'a kind of propensity or yearning in matter.' Following Isidore of Seville, therefore, whose influential *Etymologies* identifies a connection between *materia* and *mater*, they regarded matter as 'fertile, maternal, labile' and – that word again – 'percolating.'

Bynum's style, in this book as elsewhere, might itself be described as per-

colating. She tends to keep in constant circulation a repertoire of ideas and examples, repeatedly reprising earlier remarks in later sections but without always adding substantially to the argument. This makes for a sometimes repetitious book, and an overall thesis about materiality that is, so to speak, difficult to get hold of. (This is not helped by a tendency to make erratic chronological and topographical leaps.) The book makes no mention of the peculiar "materiality" of medieval drama, and is strangely reticent about the subject of angels – that other order of creation that is entirely immaterial. Those caveats aside, it should be stressed that this is, as one would expect, an enormously learned and insightful rumination on the subject. The volume as a whole is beautifully produced, complete with 50 full-page monochrome illustrations. Irritatingly, however, there is no bibliography.

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*Tradition, Translation, Trauma: The Classic and the Modern*  
Ed. Jan Parker and Timothy Mathews  
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)  
ISBN: 978-0-19-955459-1 (Hardcover); xvi + 358 pages  
£70

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The object of this volume, which arose from the collaboration of two research groups and from a series of international colloquia was, to quote Jan Parker, 'to release "translation" from its disciplinary home into an interdisciplinary questioning' (p. 17). In the tapestry of intertwining and interrelated themes and sub-themes introduced by the editors and contributors, this object has clearly been attained. The extraordinary breadth of subject and the wide variety of interlocking issues which make up the fabric of the volume combine to produce a kaleidoscope of theory which will present a different picture to each reader.

In the Prologue, Susan Bassnett speaks of the various meanings of the word 'translation,' but the one semantic shade which she does not mention is the Latin *translatio*, as part of the medieval concept of *translatio studii*, which seems to me precisely what this book is about: the transference of knowledge, transference in the sense of both appropriation by a new host culture and in the sense of transformation.

Both on the level of discussion and of technique, each of the contributions to the volume raises fundamental questions about how we see and interpret texts. 'Interpretation' is perhaps a particularly useful term in this respect as it overlaps semantically not only with 'translation,' but also with that other major theme of many of the contributions: 're-enactment' (for the latter see, in particular, the essays of Jan Parker and Jane Montgomery Griffiths). The re-creation and re-interpretation of classical texts are major themes in the discussions of the re-inventions of the *Aeneid* by Frederick Ahl, the *Iliad* by David Hopkins, and Cicero by Matthew Fox. Indeed, much of the volume deals with a re-evaluation

of the Classical, and indeed history itself, and of its impact, sometimes traumatic, on the modern. Three further contributions concentrate on the issues of interpretation of the past: Pat Easterling discusses the interpretation of journeys in Sophoclean plays by both the characters and the audiences, Christopher Pendergast explores the concepts of modernity, history, and the counterfactuals, and Helena Buescu investigates the role of the visual in the negotiation with the past in *Das Áfricas*. Indeed, the attribution of the act of interpretation to the figures of the Classic (whether they are characters of historical figures) and the negotiation between that interpretation and the interpretation of the present-day audience, a feature of both Easterling and Pendergast's discussions, is a recurring idea in the volume. An example of the combination of the two is Richard Armstrong's discussion of the *Fellini Satyricon*, where a re-evaluation and reconstruction of the past is taking place in both the essay and in its subject. The main characteristic of the film, as Armstrong notes, is fragmentation and dismemberment, not only of a character, Eumolpus (Eumolpo in Fellini), but also through the fragmentation and dismemberment of the narrative which is being adapted for the screen (pp. 121-2, 124).

This brings us to the next major theme of the book: the fascination of dismemberment. This is a particularly strong (traumatic) image in the volume, and is best illustrated by Rilke's image of the Archaic Torso – the ultimate fragment, isolated from its original context, yet thereby particularly compelling (pp. 13-14). This fascination with the fragmentary is strongly reminiscent of the sculpture of Rodin (1840-1917). One thinks in particular of Rodin's torsos which imitate damaged antique statues, (see, for example <http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/torso-young-woman-arched-back> [last viewed January 14, 2011]).

Another strong parallel which might have been used to illustrate some of the points in the volume is Rodin's technique of *assemblage*, adding small plaster figures to antique pottery (for an example, see: <http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/standing-female-nude-vase> [last viewed January 14, 2011]). Translation and interpretation as *assemblage*, building on the fragments of the Classic, can be argued to be the subject of Rachel Bowlby's enquiry into the meaning of Sophocles' *Oedipus* in the twenty-first century. Her investigation of the interrelation between understandings of the play and contemporary developments in child-parent relations and familial identities in comparison with previous eras and interpretations, as exemplified by the mid-twentieth-century example of Freud, provides a fascinating insight into the subjectivity of interpretation. Jan Parker's illuminating investigation of the tragic figures of Hecuba and Electra, identifying the first with pathos and the second with trauma, also can be argued to raise the issue of *assemblage*, in particular in relation to the episode (objected to by Brecht) of the actor genuinely mourning over real ashes on-stage during a performance. The communication of trauma from character to actor to audience is also the subject of Jane Montgomery Griffiths's essay 'Trauma and the Body.' Both Parker's and Griffiths's essays illustrate how the boundaries between character and actor, actor and audience, and Classical and modern become 'fuzzy,' to borrow Lorna Hardwick's term. Similarly 'fuzzy' are the divisions between public and private, classical, traditional and modern forms of the expressions of lament discussed by Gail Holst-Warhaft.

The issue of 'fuzziness' insomuch as it entails a blurring of boundaries, is

tightly linked to the issue of evolution and mutability. In his discussion of the poetry of Ezra Pound, Mary Butts, and T. S. Eliot, Ian Patterson brings up the image of modernist verse as poetry's way of coping with the past and with change. A similar issue is raised in Wen-chin Ouyang's discussion of modernity in Arabic poetics, focusing primarily on the avant-garde Arab poet Adonis, presents the unexpected cultural encounter as trauma which becomes a 'catalyst for another modernity' (p. 191). Both these essays, and that of Jonathan Monroe, explore the role of various 'encounters' in the fluidity of the 'modern'. The same fluidity and mutability can also be observed in a genre we would tend to regard as fixed rather than fluid, the memoir, in Piotr Kukiwiczak's discussion of the various versions of Władisław Szpilman's *Śmierć Miasta* (better known in the English-speaking world as *The Pianist*).

Wen-chin Ouyang also gives us the image of modernity sandwiched between the nostalgic past and the fantasy-future (p. 196), and this is echoed by Timothy Mathews in his discussion of Noteboom, Walter Benjamin and Alberto Giacometti, when he writes of translation failing, losing the original voice, and giving in 'to the fantasy of recovery' (p. 328). The concepts of nostalgia and giving in are explored in greater detail George Rousseau's contribution.

Ultimately, this volume will be useful not only to classicists and modernists, but also to medievalists and historians: to all those who engage with the problems of translation, transmission, reception, and interpretation of the past.

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***Syon Abbey and its Books: Reading, Writing and Religion, c.1400-1700.***

**Edited by E. A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham  
(Woodbridge: Boydell&Brewer, 2010)  
ISBN: 978-1-84383-547-9 (Hardcover); 255 pages**

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Since the scrutinizing research on Sion Abbey by John Rory Fletcher (1861-1944), rightly described by Anne Hudson as an 'indefatigable researcher' (p. 246), much scholarly interest has been devoted to the late medieval community of the Bridgettine nuns in England. Scholarship on this Bridgettine monastery founded by Henry V in 1420 ranges from investigations about book culture and religious learning (C Annette Grisé: 'Women's Devotional Reading in Late-Medieval England and the Gendered Reader,' *Medium Aevum*, 71 (2002), p. 209-225; Ann Hutchinson: 'What the Nuns Read: Literary Evidence from the English Bridgettine House, Syon Abbey,' *Mediaeval Studies*, 57 (1995), p. 205-222; Rebecca Krug: *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practise in Late Medieval England*, Ithaca, NY, 2002) to Roger Ellis' outstanding study *Viderunt eam filie syon*, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 68 (Salzburg, 1984). Ellis focuses his investigation on the spirituality of Syon that can be traced from the Middle Ages to the present day, which cemented Syon's reputation as a centre of devotion and religious zeal.

The present volume arose out of a conference on Syon Abbey and its books held at the University of Exeter in October 2005 to celebrate the deposit of medieval and early modern manuscripts from Syon Abbey in the University Library. A chronology on p. xv highlights the changeful history of Syon Abbey up to 2009. The overriding theme of this essay collection is the 'interconnection between late medieval and post-Reformation monastic history and the rapidly evolving world of communication, learning, reading and books' (p. 2). Methodologically, the present volume draws on studies concerning religious history and culture as well as research on dissemination of literacy and the transformation from manuscript to print. An in-depth introduction provides the historical context for the individual essays outlining the development of Syon from its medieval origins to its eventful post-Reformation history. It is surprising that this comprehensive and otherwise well researched introduction only mentions one study concerning Birgitta of Sweden, the founder of the Bridgettine order (p. 3 n. 6, 'the chief source for this summary is Bridget Morris: *St Birgitta of Sweden*. Woodbridge, 1999') when there are other important works to be considered (for example Claire L Sahlin: *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*. Woodbridge, 2001 or the two volumes: *Studies in St Birgitta and the Bridgettine Order*. Salzburg, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 35:19). Furthermore, the introduction fails to mention the Latin edition of Birgitta's revelations which one would expect to find in the footnotes (Bergh, Birger: *Sancta Birgitta Revelaciones*, I-VIII, 1967-2002). This points to one of the disadvantages of the volume, the lack of bibliography that would have been useful for reference.

The book is divided into four sections each comprising two essays. The first thematic strand entitled 'Brothers and Sisters' with essays by Peter Cunich and Virginia Bainbridge gives an insight into life at Syon, the community's wanderings through various forms of exile after the Reformation, and their religious learning which resonates in the books they collected. In chapter 1, 'The Brothers of Syon, 1420-1695,' Peter Cunich investigates the community of brothers at Syon and their books. The learning and intense spiritual life housed in Syon continued even after the violent suppression of the monasteries by Henry VIII in 1539 (p. 41). Cunich examines in this context the role of the brothers in implementing survival strategies for the community.

Chapter 2, 'Syon Abbey: Women and Learning c. 1415-1600,' by Virginia Bainbridge focuses on the culture of learning and the dense network of leading intellectuals within Syon Abbey. Bainbridge presents extensive examples of books owned by the nuns without giving a concise conclusion. Furthermore, Bainbridge presents the Bridgettine brothers as sole mediators of learning (p. 95), but Susanne Buerkle has shown how limited the *cura monialium* could have been, in this case for the Dominican nuns of Southern Germany. (Bürkle, Susanne: *Literatur im Kloster*. Tübingen, Basel: 1999). However, Bainbridge's research is excellent in providing ample evidence of links between Syon with the universities of Oxford and Cambridge (p. 102) and in demonstrating how the interaction with leading intellectuals helped to create a unique atmosphere of spiritual devotion and learning.

The second section, 'Syon Abbey and the Book Trade,' begins with 'Syon and the English Market for Continental Printed Books: The Incunable Phase.' Vincent Gillespie establishes the connection between book quantity and pastoral duties of the Syon brothers, who needed access to a vast library in order to fulfil

their responsibility (p. 108). This led to an eager acquisition of printed books even before 1500 which might be connected with the arrival of Thomas Westham as Confessor General from Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, who brought with him his extensive library in the form of *Sammelbände*. Gillespie's contribution offers an in-depth account of the book and print culture at Syon and the added Appendix, 'Identified Incunables in the Syon Registrum' (p. 126-128), proves helpful for future research.

The second essay in this section, "'Moche profitable unto religious persones, gathered by a brother of Syon": Syon Abbey and English Books,' by historian C Annette Gris  explores Syon's contribution to the pre-Reformation English book market (p. 130). Gris  emphasises the shared characteristics of Syon literary production such as didactic and practical focus (p. 140). Her restricting statement (p. 142) that many of the characteristics of Syon texts are typical for printed texts of the period indicates how problematic it is to connect a literary tradition solely with one religious house, especially when one bears in mind the collaboration and book trade between Sheen Charterhouse and Syon Abbey. However, her final conclusion makes a valid point: 'Syon offered a more programmatic attempt to publish devotional works than any other monastic house produced [...]' (p. 154).

The third part, 'The Bridgettines in Exile,' features an essay called 'Continuity and Isolation: The Bridgettines of Syon in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century.' Walker maps the Bridgettines' experience of exile in the Low Countries and France before finally setting sail for Lisbon in 1594 under the patronage of the Spanish king Philipp II. Walker demonstrates the 'nuns' goal of returning to their native soil' (p. 176) as the driving force which led to their return to England in 1861.

The second essay in this part, 'Books and Reading in Syon Abbey, Lisbon in the Seventeenth Century,' by Caroline Bowden, ties in with the theme of exile in regard to reception of books. As Bowden points out, different reading practises were important for the community: for example, performing the office, which required reading and singing in Latin as well as communal reading to reinforce conventional ideas. Bowden summarizes that a sense of continuity was established in their reading practice as the book collection in Lisbon confirms Syon's reputation as a learned community (p. 201). Both essays in this section make a valid contribution to Bridgettine scholarship and illuminate the difficulties that the nuns overcame in finally re-settling in England.

The concluding section 'History and Memory' begins with 'The Syon Martiloge' by Claes Gejrot, who is currently working on an edition of this important manuscript (London, British Library, MS Add 22,285) with Virginia Bainbridge, which contains a list of all members and benefactors that were to be remembered on a certain day. In his essay Gejrot investigates the arrangement and function of the book, focusing on the obituary and other historical parts of the Martiloge. Gejrot's contribution is well-researched and presents detailed knowledge of the source manuscript. His essay is especially of interest to historians as it contains dates and facts about Syon, but as Gejrot remarks, 'to the philologist it offers further possibilities,' possibly in relation to the *martyrologium*, which is not included in the discussion (p. 204, n. 3). The final essay, 'Syon Abbey Preserved: Some Historians of Syon' by Ann M Hutchinson, throws light on how 'different' histories have been written about Syon Abbey, for example by two of

the late sixteenth century Syon nuns, Mary Champney and Elizabeth Sander. She ends her chapter with John Rory Fletcher (1861-1944) who documented a wide range of materials concerning Syon and whose detailed notebooks are a rich resource for scholars up to this day.

The volume ends with an Appendix, 'Syon Abbey's Books at the University of Exeter' (p. 252-254), and an index (p. 255-267) which is useful for finding relevant passages. All in all the essay collection presents an excellent range of research on the fascinating history of books and life in Syon Abbey and is a vital contribution to the growing research on the Bridgettine community.

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